



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

# **On Improving Cooperation Among Mediterranean Partners and OSCE Participating States**

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley  
to Session III of the OSCE Mediterranean Seminar, Sharm El-Sheik  
November 7, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

Let me take the opportunity to thank the Government of Egypt and Ambassador Ramzy's for hosting the 2006 OSCE Mediterranean Seminar.

The world is getting smaller, as Manuela Ramin Osmundsen said yesterday. Yes, indeed, and the Mediterranean Sea is shrinking. When I say "shrinking," I don't mean of course that it's drying up. We aren't looking at an Aral Sea problem here, after all. What I mean is you can get from Rome to Tunis in ninety minutes. Telephone, e-mail, fax and Internet links are virtually instantaneous. Economic migrants from the African side of the Mediterranean arrive on Europe's shores daily. Growing immigrant populations weave threads of connectedness back to their countries of origin. Through these effects of globalization, the two sides of the Mediterranean are being stitched back together to become closer than they've been any time really since the fall of the Roman Empire.

So, it's entirely appropriate, and encouraging, that the OSCE, the only organization representing all the states of Europe and Central Asia and the trans-Atlantic community, provides an umbrella under which participating OSCE States meet Mediterranean Partner States. Central Asia, Europe, America, North Africa and the Middle East have common interests to build upon. We need initiatives like this where we can seek cooperation, and build mutual understanding and confidence in each other to approach today's difficult security issues. We are here in recognition that the growing inter-connectedness of the Mediterranean as a region means that developments in the OSCE region impact upon security in the Mediterranean, and vice versa.

How can we get beyond stilted formality? And if we do and where we can, however, discussion – whether informal or formal – without *action* won't get us very far at all. What are the areas of interest and possibilities for cooperation on which we can move forward purposefully?

As a first step, let's identify two or three priority areas. The United States would like to suggest three priority areas: counter-terrorism, the management of multi-ethnic societies, and fair election practices.

Counter-terrorism is a priority for us all. Terrorism is a problem that transcends borders, ethnicities and religions. It has, indeed even struck in this peaceful resort city. OSCE participating States have gone a long way to ratify and implement the 13 UN Security Council resolutions on terrorism, and have used political meetings to urge implementation by OSCE members. We have tasked the OSCE Secretariat with the important job of monitoring

and reporting on progress. We encourage our Partners to commit to ratifying and fully implementing these resolutions as an important gesture of their cooperation with OSCE participating States.

Another element in countering terrorism is the fostering of cooperation among governments, civil society, and the private sector. In May of 2007, the OSCE will hold a conference on public-private partnerships, co-sponsored by the Russian Federation and the United States. The conference will explore ways governments can work better with NGOs and the private sector to combat terrorism and extremism. The model for such cooperation can be seen in how we all try to respond to natural disasters. We hope to have a more comprehensive idea developed in the coming months, which will of course be shared with Participating States and Partners. We urge the Partners to participate fully in this conference, and to consider if there are similar initiatives they can undertake in their own countries.

A second major challenge that confronts us is the management of multi-ethnic societies, including respect for religious freedom. As our world gets smaller and our cultures interconnect, our societies become more diverse. That diversity brings with it many tangible rewards, but also new challenges on how to promote inter-religious, inter-ethnic tolerance and understanding. While some OSCE countries have a good track record in this area, overall within the OSCE there is always room for improvement. We should resolve to work actively and share experiences and best practices with our Mediterranean Partners as we discuss this subject.

A third key area is that of democratic practices – again, a focus in which the OSCE and its Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights have developed considerable expertise. This expertise has been built up gradually. It began with commitments to principles. Over time, important elements of implementation review among peers were added. One of the areas where the OSCE has been most successful has been that of free elections and voting procedures. OSCE standards and methodologies simply set the benchmark worldwide for good practices. The United States encourages all of the Partners to look at this body of experience, and to consider voluntarily implementing OSCE norms, principles and commitments. Honest elections are one major building block for constructing societies that are resistant to the appeal of extremism and terrorism. The OSCE has much to offer its Partners in terms of technical assistance and a wealth of practical experience with democratic participation through elections.

Now, a comment about people who should be in or around the table with us today -- and are not. NGOs have long been partners in the OSCE's work on democratic institutions. Their work is important in strengthening societies meet a host of domestic and international challenges. There is not a single modern, democratic, stable country in which NGOs have not and/or don't play an important part. So, it is essential that the Partners bring NGOs in. The lack of an NGO event at this meeting is especially disappointing. Failure to include NGOs limits the potential impact and effectiveness of the OSCE and carrying out the commitments to which we all subscribe. We hope that the Partners will recognize this fundamental principle and hold an NGO event at the next Mediterranean Seminar.

As the Mediterranean transforms itself from a sea to a pond, we hope the neighbors on all sides of this pond will profit from trust building and sharing best practices and cooperate and talk.

I spoke with a colleague last evening who commented that it is important to keep this cooperation and meeting going. I responded that we can't even have a meeting in Israel. We need to get over that first hurdle. I hope to be meeting next year in Eilat.

And how about a scorecard since Rabat? I haven't seen what has been done since. We should keep a scorecard and see what has been achieved in Rabat and what will be achieved after Sharm El-Sheikh about which I haven't a clue.

And perhaps we should try and exchange problem solvers from the unresolved conflict areas and the Mediterranean and the reverse. The people in the Caucasus could try to resolve the issues in the Mediterranean and the people in the Mediterranean could try and resolve the conflicts in the Caucasus. To bring a fresh perspective.

Lastly, let's all keep a sense of balance and sense of humor about ourselves. I recently saw the movie 'Borat' and laughed so hard that my ribs hurt. Many people think that the plot of this movie is to make fun of Kazakhstan. But, the movie makes fun of America. It brought up all those issues about America that makes Americans cringe. So let's remember – not in serious situations, but as appropriate – to keep a sense of humor about ourselves.

Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.